New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 2 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of February 17, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1946 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Androcles and the Lion	217
*Annie Get Your Gun	382
*Another Part of the Forest	247
*Beggar's Holiday	204
*Born Yesterday	466
*Burlesque	208
*Call Me Mister	403
*Christopher Blake	233
*Cyrano de Bergerac	321
*Fatal Weakness (The)	251
*Happy Birthday	280
*Henry VIII	271
*Iceman Cometh (The)	315
*Joan of Lorraine	255
*John Gabriel Borkman	263
*Lady Windermere's Fan	307
Lovely Me	211
Made In Heaven	292
O Mistress Mine	474
Park Avenue	275
Playboy of the Western World (The)	287
*Pound on Demand	217
*Present Laughter	283
Show Boat	496
Temper the Wind	197
Toplitzky of Notre Dame	201
*What Every Woman Knows	268
Wonderful Journey	214
*Years Ago	229

1945 Vol.

*Carousel	226
Red Mill (The)	141
*State of the Union	102

1944 Vol.

*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 17, 1947*

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1947

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
*All My Sons	475
Big Two (The)	494
*Craig's Wife	457
*Finian's Rainbow	486
It Takes Two	469
*John Loves Mary	465
Little A	483
Love Goes to Press	497
Story of Mary Surratt (The)	461
*Street Scene	490
*Sweethearts	479

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 17, 1947*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"John Loves Mary" "It Takes Two"
"The Story of Mary Surratt"
"Craig's Wife"

Complete Reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC.
235 East 22nd Street New York 10, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

"Craig's Wife"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Superlative Revival

GEORGE KELLY'S celebrated play of twenty years ago, "Craig's Wife," has been given a superlative revival at the Playhouse. All that a substantial script might demand has been tendered it in a powerful and rewarding production. Judith Evelyn plays the title role of a self-centered woman who married a house rather than a man with controlled intensity. Her supporting players have been cast to perfection to realize the clean sweep and the subtleties of the drama. The author has directed his work in a masterly fashion and Stewart Chaney has designed a triumphant setting for action which depends no little on it.

Once more this season a revival has made theater-going truly exciting.

* * *

If the Pulitzer award winner of 1925 betrays its age, it is in the conventions of a period rather than the pertinence of its subject matter, or the dynamic dramatic quality of its central conflict. There is a leisurely quality to the exposition which might make ardent movie-goers impatient today. The speeches are long and sometimes on the wordy side. But the play has an unrelenting unity and a felicity of expression which makes it communicate immediately and constantly with an audience. It is a stern account of a domineering and loveless woman that it tells, barely brushed with compassion, but it is tremendously engrossing.

* * *

As was the case when Chrystal Herne originally played "Craig's Wife" on Broadway, or Irene Rich and Rosalind Russell appeared in screen versions, it is a superb acting vehicle. Miss Evelyn does far more than take advantage of a spectacular part. She weaves her portrayal of Mrs. Craig into the fabric of the drama so artfully and believably that the final scene, in which she is left alone in the handsome mausoleum she has built around herself, is electrifying. Her encounters with her husband and his aunt, her servants and her niece are executed with brilliant timing and crescendo. She is a lovely, terrible and tragic figure.

* * *

The others in this classical indictment of a selfish American matriarch never fail the star. Philip Ober is immense as the slow-witted husband who finally realizes that his wife is trying to bury him with her in impeccable majesty. The scene in which he smashes a statuette and lights a cigarette in the ornamental living room of which he is not the master is a bit of telling theater. Kathleen Comegys plays the aware aunt with bustling authority and Viola Roache is exactly right as Mrs. Craig's long-suffering housekeeper. Then there are Virginia Dwyer, as the niece, Dortha Duckworth and Virginia Hammond to round out an impressive panel of performances. "Craig's Wife" is a bit verbose, but it is a fine play magnificently recreated for our day.

'CRAIG'S WIFE.'

Play by George Kelly; staged by the author; setting designed by Stewart Chaney; decor by Jensen's; presented by Gant Gaither at the Playhouse Wednesday evening, February 12, 1947. The cast:

Miss Austin	Kathleen Comegys
Mrs. Harold	Viola Roache
Maria	Dortha Duckworth
Mrs. Craig	Judith Evelyn
Ethel Landreth	Virginia Dwyer
Walter Craig	Philip Ober
Mrs. Frazier	Virginia Hammond
Billy Birkmire	Herschel Bentley
Joseph Catelle	Hugh Rennie
Harry	Allan Nourse
Eugene Fredericks	John Hudson

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place in the living room of the home of Mr. Walter Craig. Act I. 8:30 in the evening. Act II. Ten minutes later. Act III. The following morning at 8:30.

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 14, 1947

Kronenberger

Mrs. Craig Still Retains Her Hateful Fascination

PM Reviews

As an evening in the theater, *Craig's Wife* still holds up. It is still shrewd playmaking. It still interests and at times even fascinates you. Satisfy you it does not, if indeed it ever did. The reason for this is twofold: the play does not go deep enough into the lady, or far enough out into life. As for Mrs. Craig, it is perhaps Mr. Kelly's approach that proves the main obstacle. As for the play, it is not so much artificial as simply airless. Everything registers but almost nothing vibrates. Mr. Kelly's world seems as insulated in its way as Mrs. Craig fought to make her own.

Mrs. Craig, as everyone knows, fought—not just instinctively, but with the utmost calculation — to make her life "secure." For that, but only for that, she needed a husband; and since you could lose security through a husband as well as gain it, he must be wholly dominated, and cut off as much as possible from the outside world. Everything, indeed, must be controlled and dominated—there must be no loopholes through which Mrs. Craig's security could be assailed. And the passion for security turned into a passion for the thing that symbolized it—for Mrs. Craig's fine house. In the end, of course, the house destroyed the home, and Mrs. Craig was left in it abandoned and alone.

* * *

Harriet Craig is, all too plainly, a hard and selfish woman, a monstrous wife, an impossible household employer. Much of her fascination for the audience rests on her hatefulness; and so, perhaps, does *too* much of her fascination for Mr. Kelly. I doubt, having just seen the play again, whether Mr. Kelly's reputed misogyny, his going after Mrs. Craig with whips and flails, quite squares with the facts. But if not a purely misogynous, there is at least a moral compulsion on his part to see that Mrs. Craig gets all that is coming to her. He seems more concerned with flaying the woman than with finding out about her; he seems too much the moralist and not enough the psychologist, or for that matter the sociologist. For surely beneath what makes her act from selfishness is what makes her act from fear. She is a violent neurotic, a real "case"—on any other grounds, indeed, she wouldn't be at all credible. She is partly the product of her upbringing (as Mr. Kelly indicates), partly of a whole social structure (as Mr. Kelly fails to suggest), partly of her own distorted reading of life. The fear of insecurity that makes some people stingy, or others obsequious, or still others corrupt, has made her fanatically ruthless. Her passion for her possessions is not the half-esthetic, half-acquisitive passion of Henry James' protagonist in *The Spoils of Poynton;* it is a final warped manifestation as much as it is a primary trait. None of this, it seems to me, is probed deeply enough in the play; and the answer would seem to lie in Mr. Keily's approach rather than his lack of acumen. His own emotion about Mrs. Craig goes largely in another direction; and it keeps her from being as convincing as she should be.

But the airlessness of the play helps weaken conviction, too. Everything seems neat, sharp, articulate—more like a realistic demonstration than like reality itself. The characters surrounding Mrs. Craig only seem to breathe when they breathe scorn. Mr. Kelly fails us in the same degree that he fascinates us, by reducing things to effective but constricted terms of theater. If the whole thing were very intense, we would probably not stop to ask whether it was real; but it is only very interesting. And there is something sealed up, almost bottled up, about the play.

Mr. Kelly's staging, though it has a fascination of its own, accentuates this. It is peculiarly formalized, a matter of flow and stress, of generally very rapid pace coupled with deliberate retardations, of people evolving not so much a play as a pattern. It is not arty, as this may make it sound; it is for me, indeed, the thing that makes this revival most interesting. But you enjoy it for its own sake; it does not quite suit (any more than some of the slightly stilted dialoge quite suits) the realistic postulates of the play.

As Mrs. Craig, Judith Evelyn once again proves herself an excellent actress, and helps bring things into focus by stressing the neurotic rather than the hateful side of the lady. As Craig, Philip Ober is quite competent in a role that does not allow of brilliance; and Kathleen Comegys is very good as Craig's aunt. Virginia Hammond is adequate but not another Josephine Hull, as Mrs. Frazier; and Viola Roache does a solid job as the housekeeper. The set, by Stewart Chaney, is a sound one. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

THE PLAY

Back in 1926 George Kelly's "Craig's Wife," the penetrating study of a selfish, narrow woman, won him the Pulitzer Prize. Since then Harriet Craig has come to life in a couple of movies, has been heard on the radio and has been somewhat of a staple of little theatres throughout the land. Last night at The Playhouse she came back to Broadway under the sponsorship of Gant Gaither, and it is indeed surprising that so much of her story remains of interest. Yet it must be said that the years have robbed her of her sting. Perhaps there have been too many carbon copies of her since, perhaps Mr. Kelly's direction has not been properly calculated. At all events "Craig's Wife," while still fascinating for its bitter portrayal of a woman who put her home and security ahead of everything else, including her husband, is not the play it seems to have been a generation back.

Harriet Craig, of course, is Mr. Kelly's most celebrated heroine. A misogynist who has been dissecting the female of the species ever since, Mr. Kelly has made her a diabolical representative of her sex, a nagging, fastidious woman whose desire for dominance over the male robs her husband of his social contacts, his chance to achieve his place, his business and the opportunity for a congenial home life. When a couple the Craigs had known are found dead the morning after Mr. Craig had been playing cards with the husband, Harriet puts her own security ahead of his. Her bigoted devotion to her home drives away her husband's aunt and her maids. And even at the end, when everything she has planned has collapsed about her, she is unable to admit anyone into her confidence.

If ever there was the feeling that Harriet Craig was overdrawn, it became more certain last night under Mr. Kelly's apparent insistence on a speedy pace. Whatever reasons he may have had, the first two acts were played with the speed of a hurrying train. The speeches were uttered so that one had the feeling that they were exercises in rapidity. The result was that there was a nervousness in Harriet's portrayal which at times made her appear almost ludicrous. Never a character to gain anyone's sympathy, she nevertheless has a deep-seated motivation for her pathology, and this does not come to the fore strongly enough as a result of the stepped-up tempo of the performance. "Craig's Wife" is a study in character, but in this revival it does not go deep enough.

Still, it cannot be denied that Mr. Kelly's play has many interesting passages. His ability to understand and display a certain type of woman on the stage is not to be denied. And there are some highly-literate speeches and strong, logical dialogue. Judith Evelyn, in the title role, does a remarkable job under the circumstances. She endows it with considerable energy if not all the subtlety for which one might ask. Philip Ober as Walter Craig renders a restrained performance. His is not a particularly rewarding role, incidentally, and some of the later situations in the play in which he manifests his revolt no longer are dramatic, if ever they were.

Viola Roache, in the role of Mrs. Harold, the housekeeper, is most satisfactory. She plays with humor and is one of the bright spots of the evening. Kathleen Comegys in the role of Walter Craig's aunt, who first opens his vision to the kind of woman he has married, does nicely, and Virginia Hammond does her brief bit as the neighboring Mrs. Frazier with dispatch, although she, too, could do with a little less haste. Stewart Chaney has designed the reception room of the Craig fortress.

L. F.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

'Craig's Wife' Opens At Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Thanks to exceptionally hokey staging by the author, it is difficult to tell from Gant Gaither's revival of "Craig's Wife" whether the George Kelly Pulitzer prize winning play or the Kelly direction has aged most.

When the players were permitted to resemble normal human beings last evening, Kelly's Strindbergian indictment of women who marry men for houses and then shut out the hapless victims' friends struck across the footlights like a Joe Louis right landing on an opponent's chin.

But they were seldom allowed by Kelly to get down to the business of reading intelligently and effectively some trenchant and well phrased observations on feminine dishonesty. Instead they were kept exercising like overweight fighters in Stillman's gym, to the detriment of the script's content.

We came to have a high regard for Judith Evelyn as an actress after seeing her splendid performance in "Angel Street." That performance proved her to be one of our better actresses. So don't judge her merits on her impersonation of the treacherous, selfish Mrs. Craig now on view at the Playhouse.

Kelly has her rushing through lengthy speeches like a politician yet to master radio broadcasting technique. The main idea seemed to be to get the words out in a given length of time and let their meanings fall where they might. And he has her imitating the gyrations of the old-timers one can see in the Modern Museum of Art's vintage films.

The unfortunate Miss Evelyn dashes about stage, arms flailing, hips sasshaying like a harassed football quarterback eluding enemy tacklers till he can shake loose a forward pass receiver.

Another Kelly casualty is Virginia Hammond as a friendly neighbor, widow Frazier. The widow has evidently become a nervous wreck from living next to the venomous Mrs. Craig so long, for her fidgity, hysterical emoting would interest a curious doctor.

Kathleen Comegys, Philip Ober, Viola Roache and young Virginia O'Dwyer seem to have been wiser than the Misses Evelyn and Hammond, refusing to be stampeded into hamming it up. Miss Comegys and Ober deserve especial salutes to keeping their hands and arms in check, and for making sense with the Kelly dialogue.

The Kelly system of playwrighting should be subsidized by the telephone company, for it calls for a resort to the little black mouthpiece-receiver whenever Kelly wants to contrive a scene or send someone leaping across stage like a super-charged ballet dancer.

"Craig's Wife," we suspect, is still a good, well made play. We should like to see a sensible, restrained performance before definitely coming to the opposite conclusion. But it could be, as a customer was overheard to observe that such plays went out of style when neurotics like Mrs. Craig started going to psychiatrists.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

'Craig's Wife,' Brilliantly Written And Played, Seems New as Ever

By JOHN CHAPMAN

George Kelly, the scourge of females, has a new drama which is a savage and brilliant flaying of a possessive woman, and it is being brilliantly and savagely acted at the Playhouse. It is "Craig's Wife."

True, "Craig's Wife" was first presented in New York 22 years ago, so its current production is technically a revival. But—this season particularly—the word "revival" connotes something which is old-hat, something which has been dug up and dusted off but still retains a musty odor. Mr. Kelly's drama is too good, too alive, to be called anything but new.

As a new play it will stand with the best and it has been admirably staged. Mr. Kelly's merciless exposure of Mrs. Craig is matched by the merciless playing of the role by Judith Evelyn; his dislike for Mrs. Craig finds full expression in Philip Ober's performance as Mr. Craig. Always a notably thorough actress, Miss Evelyn is asking no quarter as she presents a cold, hard and resourceful woman—and she gets none from an audience which relishes the shattering completeness of her defeat.

Comes Tumbling Down.

Mr. Kelly's story is of a woman who has married, not to have a husband, but to have the material things which the right kind of husband can bring—money, social position and above all things a fine house. To her, romance is impractical, and anything impractical is not worth bothering about.

But her house, she finds, is only a stack of cards for all its splendor, and it comes tumbling down about her. And tumbling, too, is Mrs. Craig—cut right down to ground level.

Since George Kelly is the author, here again one finds a play, like his lighter and funnier "The Fatal Weakness," which has impeccable manners and intelligent talk. Under the author's direction an excellent company plays it quietly and surely. "Craig's Wife" flaunts no political or social messages, but it nevertheless is adult theatre—the sort which makes the Playhouse truly a playhouse.

The supporting cast is always equal to achieving the author's intent, with good performances being offered by Viola Roache, Kathleen Comegys, Virginia Dwyer, Dortha Duckworth and Virginia Hammond. Stewart Chaney's setting is delightful.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

George Kelly's Pulitzer Play Retains Its Dramatic Power

By Richard Watts Jr.

Although modern plays have a disconcerting way of showing their age, "Craig's Wife," which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1926, is still a vigorous and healthy drama. There are remarkably few signs of its years as it goes briskly and efficiently about its business of presenting one of the most detestable ladies the theatre has known since the late Hedda Gabler and then pillorying her neatly. The presentation in one season of "The Fatal Weakness" and this excellent revival should remind any one who may have forgotten it that George Kelly is quite a dramatist.

Veteran playgoers who recall the original production, with Chrystal Herne in the title role, Charles Trowbridge as the long-suffering husband and Josephine Hull as the neighbor who grew roses, will not have their sentimental memories offended, since the current edition has a wisely selected cast that plays its skillfully written parts admirably. And Mr. Kelly, who has staged it, always knows how to direct his dramas to the fullest advantage.

Judith Evelyn, who understandably attracted a lot of attention as the persecuted heroine of "Angel Street," would hardly have been my choice for the disagreeable Mrs. Craig, which goes to show that the producer was wiser than I am. At the beginning Miss Evelyn struck me as being perhaps too obvious in presenting the lady's ruthlessness, but it was not long before she was handling the part with honesty and insight, and her final scene is brilliantly done.

Philip Ober has the sympathetic role of the turning-worm husband, and he manages it with a quiet force that is most effective. No one can quite equal Josephine Hull in the type of part she has made her own, but Virginia Hammond plays the garrulous neighbor with excellent humor.

As you may remember, most of the other players have roles which consist chiefly of telling the unpopular Mrs. Craig what they think of her, and in the present version they do it with skill and relish. As the aunt who first sees through the lady's schemes, Kathleen Comegys is particulary good, and as the plain-spoken housekeeper Viola Roache is of vast help to the proceedings. The smaller roles are also effectively managed.

It is perhaps unnecessary to go into the subject matter of "Craig's Wife," since it is assuredly one of the best known of all American plays. On the chance, however, that you have spent the last twenty-five years in Tibet, it may be reported briefly that it has to do with the exposure and punishment of a cold and selfish woman who loves only her home and her domination over it and looks upon her husband as merely a foolish, romantic obstacle to her tyranny.

Mr. Kelly clearly dislikes Mrs. Craig with great heartiness, but he is fair enough to make her more than just an ogre. To a certain extent he forgives her by explaining how her early home environment had made her what she was, and in the end she becomes, grudgingly, almost a touching figure, but on the whole it is a brilliantly relentless portrait of an extremely unlovely woman that he presents.

As it is impossible not to admire the merciless but understanding skill with which the author has dissected Mrs. Craig, it is likewise difficult to avoid appreciating the technical brilliance of his playwriting. There is hardly a waste motion in "Craig's Wife" and the effects are gained with ease, simplicity and impressive power. I still think it is quite a trick to make an exciting dramatic moment out of a husband lighting a cigarette and throwing the match on his wife's floor. "Craig's Wife" is a very good play indeed.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

'Craig's Wife,' Pulitzer Prize Winner in '25, Is Still a Good Play in 1947.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Craig's Wife," George Kelly's study of a chilly and calculating woman with an overwhelming passion for security, was put on at the Playhouse last night, two decades and two years after its first production, and it holds up rather well. A young Kentuckian, Gant Gaither, makes the presentation; his bow as a Broadway producer.

Perhaps some of the sharpness of the original presentation is now missing, and it's altogether possible that the author, with his direction and over-direction, has sacrificed something in force by an increase in tempo, but "Craig's Wife" remains a resolute and honest drama.

A well-constructed piece, this Pulitzer Prize play of 1926, in which Kelly makes ingenious use of a melodramatic incident to reveal to Walter Craig his wife's true self and to show him just how little he actually means to her. And it is this revelation that leads to his revolt and to his saying good-by, with the numbed Mrs. Craig circling her spotless room, dropping rose petals on her sacred floor.

The resourceful Judith Evelyn is the acquisitive Harriet Craig of this 1947 revival. She plays the role somewhat jerkily, and definitely on the neurotic side, and she is without the cold austerity that was Chrystal Herne's, but she improves steadily as she goes along and characterizes Mrs. Craig as a fanatical and empty woman, a self-centered tyrant in her own domain.

Philip Ober is likable and has force and dignity as the husband, who finally walks out, just as Emma Brooks did in "Paid in Full" and just as Ibsen's Nora has been doing for half a century. Kathleen Comegys has restraint, authority and believability as Craig's aunt and Virginia Hammond makes a person of Mrs. Frazier, the kindly neighbor of the white roses. Miss Hammond must have well realized, in being cast for the part, that she was taking over a difficult assignment, that of following Josephine Hull. Viola Roache and Dortha Duckworth are amusing as the servants, given to furtive, beneath-the-stairs gabbling. Stewart Chaney has given the Craigs a handsome suburban interior.

"Craig's Wife" has the Kelly touches—bits of unerring dialogue, fragments of genuine comedy, windy but well written speeches. It was a good play in 1925 and it still is in '47.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

'Craig's Wife' Revived At the Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

This has come to be known as The Season of Revivals. One by one, the old successes have returned to Broadway. Hopefully!

"The Front Page." "Jealousy," with its title changed to "Obsession." "Cyrano de Bergerac." "Lady Windermere's Fan." "Lysistrata," in blackface. "The Playboy of the Western World." "Henry VIII." "What Every Woman Knows." "John Gabriel Borkman" and "Androcles and the Lion," in repertory. "Burlesque." "The Beggar's Opera," with the mendicant on a holiday.

And now "Craig's Wife!" George Kelly's old success returned last night to Broadway and set itself up with handsome hopefulness at the Playhouse. Gant Gaither is the producer of this latest addition to The Season of Revivals.

A newcomer with proper determination to put his good foot forward, he has given Mr. Kelly's Pulitzer Prize Play the very best of everything. From cast by Equity to lorgnettes by Lugene, the revival is quite obviously top-drawer. It most certainly should be!

When, 22 years ago come October, Rosalie Stewart displayed the potential prize-winner at the Morosco, its set-up was neither as high nor handsome as it was last night at 48th st. Nor was its reception as dutifully enthusiastic.

In that season of 1925-1926, "Craig's Wife" was made to wait around before it found its public. Or before its public found it, maybe! One way or the other, the play and its public finally got together and a good run was had by both.

Then, women found Mrs. Craig, oh, so fascinating! And they brought their men along to share their fascination. Now, however—

* * *

Change in Audience

Well, "Craig's Wife" hasn't changed, while the women who come to see it have changed enormously. It's in me to wonder if the woman of 1947 will find George Kelly's house-haunted female as fascinating as did the woman of 1925. Frankly, I hope so!

Yet, with equal frankness, I doubt it. For, in these admittedly unsympathetic eyes, there's nothing the matter with Harriet Craig that a good sock on the jaw won't cure. Mr. Craig could end his every trouble with a single swift kayo.

But he doesn't! So his wife continues to live the life of the turtle, carrying her castle on her back and threatening the happiness of everybody who comes near it. Harriet is house-haunted as no character has ever been before.

The house that haunts her is also her husband, her children and her friends. She's married to it, as Walter Craig points out. And, as Auntie Austin tells her, she's making people miserable with her idolatry of things.

So the final curtain at the Playhouse in 1947, duplicating the final curtain at the Morosco in 1925, leaves Harriet Craig alone at last in her precious reception-room, her husband, her kinfolk and her servants having fled.

Her unwelcome neighbor's unwelcome roses against her bosom, she wanders back and forth. Petals falling to the floor, eyes wide and despairing, she continues to wander desolately as the revival of "Craig's Wife"—the thirteenth revival of the season—ends.

A well-tempered play, "Craig's Wife." Well written, well-motivated, well-intended. Let's admit that a few Harriet Craigs may be still alive. So what?

* * *

Harriet Believable

Following three unstarred roles on Broadway—Mrs. Manningham in "Angel Street;" Mrs. Overton in "The Overtons;" Mrs. Fenwick in "The Rich Full Life"—Judith Evelyn is the star of this revival of George Kelly's prize-winning play.

As Mrs. Craig, originated in the flesh by Chrystal Herne and in the films by Rosalind Russell, Miss Evelyn is excellent. More mellow, superficially, than her predecessors, she makes Harriet more believable.

As the Walter Craig whose wife she is, Philip Ober is a model husband—"model," as any dictionary will remind you, meaning "a small imitation of the real thing!" And that's what Mr. Kelly orders.

Viola Roache is deft and delightful as the housekeeper who's a Greek Chorus in modern dress. Virginia Hammond, in Josephine Hull's old role, makes much of the rose-bearing Mrs. Frazier. As a matter of fact, the entire new cast is fine and dandy.

The season of 1925-1926, the season in which "Craig's Wife" was a Pulitzer Prize winner, was the season of "The Green Hat," "The Great God Brown," "The Dybbuk" and "The Enemy." Which add up to, no great season.

In this season of 1946-1947, the Season of Revivals, it has stronger competition. Even so, we more or less old-timers, deep in nostalgia, adore it. My worry is about the younger generation, to whom nostalgia is anathema . . .

To me, "Craig's Wife" is quite all right, as revivals come. But, as revivals go, its house-haunted heroine does seem dated.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 13, 1947

Story of 'Craig's Wife' Still Absorbing Drama

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The 20 years since she won George Kelly the Pulitzer Prize have not added a wrinkle to the face of "Craig's Wife." She is as absorbing a monster as she is timeless. She is now getting a performance by Judith Evelyn that secures that actress unshakably in the top ranks of the theater.

Mr. Kelly's chief interest is always people rather than events or plot. Friction between characters ferments until a slight gesture carries more dramatic impact than any shocking violence.

Superficially the content of the play seems static, but in this performance it seems not to progress so much as to inflate far beyond any normal emotional bursting point.

The unveiling of Harriet Craig is an ugly thing to watch, but so deserved that it is intensely satisfying. The special kind of security she desires must seem empty to a normal person. To Mrs. Craig, cowardly anti social, an immaculate house that cuts off the world out weighs even the importance of her husband.

Conniving Egoism.

What she calls being practical about insuring her safety, is a conniving egoism that destroys any barriers in the way toward her goal.

The play tells how a gratuitous incident threatens to shake her secret and carefully laid structure. Muddled with fear, until any veneer of consideration cracks off, she makes the fatal mistake of showing her husband her egomaniacal philosophy.

In the end she gets what in theory she wanted, and one is left with a bitter glimpse of just how she is going to like it.

The play is verbose, but tellingly so. It is filled with lengthy speeches, almost monologues, that demand the utmost taste and resource of the actors. With driving direction, Mr. Kelly has made the formidable members of his cast run first-class races.

A Genius for Tempo.

Miss Evelyn has a genius for tempo that never sacrifices clarity. Harriet Craig's devious mind causes false conversational starts. Under pressure she stalls for time with meaningless comments. She is constantly hiding a motive, denying a truth and insinuating a lie all at once.

Miss Evelyn projects this complicated character without straining for her effects. She carries the devious role a step further by frequently making you think the woman believes what she is saying, when you know perfectly well she does not.

Quick Transition.

Like a calm after a tempest, she simmers down through the last act to a moving pantomime of desolation. It is a compelling artful performance of great conviction.

Philip Ober reveals unsuspected strength as the Mr. Craig whose wife calls him a romantic fool. The transition from a loving hoodwinked mate to a disgusted rebel is quick, but he makes it reasonably and with emotional depth.

Kathleen Comegys is supremely human as Craig's aunt, and Viola Roache makes the most of the housekeeper's penetrating humor. Virginia Hammond rambles laughably and pathetically through the autobiography of a talkative neighbor.

For this play in which the setting is so important, Stewart Chaney has done an exquisite job. The temple Harriet Craig makes of her fanatically beloved house is a thing of austere beauty.

"The Story of Mary Surratt"

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

THE PLAY

For the second time within a fortnight Broadway has received a play of worthy content and interest. By John Patrick, who gave us the poignant comedy, "The Hasty Heart," two winters back, it is "The Story of Mary Surratt," which the Messrs. Russell Lewis and Howard Young brought to Henry Miller's theatre Saturday evening. In it Mr. Patrick is depicting the trial and conviction of the woman who went to the gallows charged with complicity in the assassination of Lincoln. Since Mr. Patrick's excursion among the archives has convinced him that she was erroneously accused, the unfortunate victim of the hysteria and prejudice of the period, he has written a play which, for all its flaws, comes out a compassionate plea for justice with meaning for all men.

Through six scenes and three acts he pursues the evidence he has found, from the "iniquitous" arrest of Mary Surratt in the living room of her Washington, D. C., boarding house to the final moments in her cell. Having culled his information from testimony, records and sundry documents and permitting himself some dramatic license, he presents her as a trusting mother completely unaware of the nefarious undertaking even though it was hatched under her roof and involved her son. The play opens a few hours before the crime, and it is only when another roomer advises her of her son's mysterious movements that she suspects trouble. However, even after asking John Wilkes Booth to see her in an attempt to persuade him to give up his friendship with her son, she has no clue to the actual machinations about to be consummated.

The second act and part of the third are devoted to the trial, during which the military presides, thrusting aside favorable evidence it does not care to hear and admitting that which supports its case. In the final scene, Mr. Patrick, speaking through Reverdy Johnson, who defended her, gives her the moral courage to die, promising that in miscarriages of justice such as this men of good-will are inflamed to set their houses aright.

Mr. Patrick has directed his play with reliance on restraint, and he is, of course, most fortunate in having Dorothy Gish and Kent Smith to play the leading roles. Miss Gish, as the bewildered, innocent woman, brings to the part a calm dignity that wins the audience's sympathy. Surrounded on all sides by demands for "justice," she carries herself through her ordeal with pride and strength. Mr. Smith, as the attorney, fighting a losing battle, is equally restrained and plays without flourish. In the role of Mary Surratt's daughter, Elizabeth Ross underscores the fine impression she made in her only previous Broadway apearance in the title role of "Song of Bernadette."

As a chapter out of history, Mr. Patrick's play has the merit of shedding light on a generally glossed-over tragedy of another post-war period. As a drama it falls somewhat short of its mark, most of all, probably, because it is held to earth by the comparative minor stature of its heroine. The first act is somewhat sluggish and there are moments when the characters do not come alive but seem, rather, figures in a historical pageant. Still before the austere sets of Samuel Leve, "The Story of Mary Surratt," is able to convey its anger without becoming overwrought. And that is a tribute to Mr. Patrick's talent as a craftsman of the theatre. L. F.

'THE STORY OF MARY SURRATT'

Play by John Patrick; directed by the author; designed by Samuel Leve; lighting by Girvan Higginson; presented by Russell Lewis and Howard Young at the Henry Miller's Theater, Saturday evening, February 8, 1947. The cast:

Anna Surratt	Elizabeth Ross
Mary Surratt	Dorothy Gish
Louis Weichman	Bernard Thomas
Louis Payne	Don Shelton
George Atzerodt	Zachary Berger
David Herold	Michael Fox
John Surratt	John Conway
John Wilkes Booth	James Monks
Capt. William Smith	Graham Denton
Sgt. Day	Larry Johns
Col. Burnett	Douglas McEachin
Gen. Joshua Holden	Richard Sanders
Brig.-Gen. Ekin	Wallis Roberts
Reverdy Johnson	eKst Smith
Major-Gen. Hunter	Edward Harvey
Brig.-Gen. Harris	Frank McFarland
Major-Gen. Wallace	Robert Neff
Major-Gen. Kautz	Thomas Glynn
Brig.-Gen. Howe	Robert Morgan
Brig.-Gen. Foster	Dallas Boyd
Col. Tompkins	Lee Malbourne
Col. Clendenin	Arthur Stenning
Special Provost Marshal	Tom Daly
Major Henry Rathbone	Gordon Barnes
Lt. Henry Von Steinacker	Bill Hitch
Gen. Jubal Bentley	John Pimley
Father Wigst	Harlan Briggs
W. E. Doster	Hugh Mosher
Dr. Samuel Mudd	Tom J. McGivern
Edward Spangler	Lytton Robinson
Michael O'Laughlin	Bill Reynolds
Samuel Arnold	Larry Johns
Guard	Earl Dawson
Soldier	Michael Roano
Soldier	Clyde Cook

SYNOPSIS—Act I, Scene 1. The livingroom of Mary Surratt's boarding house, Washington, D. C., 1865. Scene 2. The same—three hours later. Scene 3. The same—one week later. Act II. An improvised courtroom in the old penitentiary building, a few days later. Act III. Scene 1. The same. Midnight, several weeks later. Scene 2. A cell in the old penitentiary building on the U. S. Arsenal grounds at Washington, D. C., a few minutes before noon on the following day.

PM

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

Kronenberger

An Old Page of History Falls Short as Drama

PM Reviews

The story of Mary Surratt is an interesting bit of American history, but it does not make (or at any rate, has not made) a very effective play. To brush up on our history first, it was in Mary Surratt's Washington boarding-house that John Wilkes Booth met with his fellow-conspirators (the original plot concerned, of course, many others than Lincoln, and the original plan was not to assassinate Lincoln but to abduct him.) One of the conspirators was Mrs. Surratt's son. After Lincoln was shot, Mrs. Surratt was arrested, and was among those later tried before a military court, found guilty, and hanged. There has always been a certain doubt concerning the reality of her guilt; there never has been the slightest doubt concerning the harshness of her trial.

Mr. Patrick springs here to her defense, apparently in no doubt whatever that she was innocent. That she knew nothing of what was going on under her roof is, indeed, almost the first thing established in the play—which thereafter, so far as I am able to judge, fairly well follows the known facts. And it follows them, it would seem, with a certain larger purpose than merely vindicating Mary Surratt. The viciously unfair trial she receives is the basis for a timeless (or, it may be, a carefully timed) protest on Mr. Patrick's part against injustice—against the denial of constitutional rights, against the perversion of democratic tenets. Post-bellum 1865 and post-bellum 1947 are not without their parallels.

• • •

This pleading is praiseworthy in itself, but beyond being rather too overtly conveyed, it adds verbiage to a play already pretty thin on action. Mary Surratt's story takes on drama, really, only during Mary Surratt's trial. For an act we are watching something fateful and checkered, and are kept interested not only by its human but its inhuman aspects. But before that, things seem for the most part both slack and stagy; and after that we are largely back among words, and pretty literary words, as a woman bitter with God and man prepares to die. Mr. Patrick has made something at moments of Mary Surratt as a person; and Dorothy Gish has made something of the role, playing it with force and feeling. But Mr. Patrick has not created anything like so fully rounded a woman as to make *The Story of Mary Surratt* a play of character; she is some one wronged, first, and only secondarily some one real.

Although, for my own taste, there is too much fancy writing in *Mary Surratt*, probably the prime trouble with it is that there isn't enough material to make a play. But certainly the prime trouble with Mr. Patrick's approach is that by championing Mrs. Surratt as an innocent woman, he denies us all the psychological excitement of sifting the evidence, of guessing whether she was innocent or guilty. For just that reason, the Mary Surratt of history is a much more dramatic figure than Mr. Patrick's Mary; she still brings out the bloodhound in us.

Kent Smith does a good job as Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, who defended Mary Surratt at her trial. Elizabeth Ross is fairly effective as Mary's daughter, James Monks excusably histrionic as Booth, Harlan Briggs up to all his opportunities as a sharp-tongued priest, and some one I can't identify (there are about a dozen Union generals listed in the program) quite vigorous as one of the military men at the trial.

—Louis Kronenberger.

Journal-American

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

'Mary Surratt' Bows At Henry Miller's

By ROBERT GARLAND

Here, back home at midnight, with bravos and applause still ringing in my ears and encore after encore lingering in my memory, I'm wondering why some history-conscious dramatist hasn't done something serious about the story of Mary Surratt before. After last Saturday evening, I'm glad nobody has.

Why? Well, to my after-the-premiere way of thinking, few, if any, living playwrights could have retold the tragic narrative of America's historic "lawful lynching" more impressively than John Patrick has retold it in his tragedy which raised the audience to its feet a short while ago in Henry Miller's Theatre.

"The Story of Mary Surratt," as our history-conscious playwright calls it straightforwardly, is John Patrick's third play to reach Broadway. The first, with Gregory Peck in it, was "The Willow and I." Mr. Peck went to Hollywood. The second, with John Lund in it, was "The Hasty Heart." Mr. Lund followed him into the sunset.

The third, which is the bravest and best, has Dorothy Gish and Kent Smith in it. Miss Gish and Mr. Smith already have been to Hollywood. But you'd never guess it there in the mellowing interior of the playhouse bearing the name of Gilbert Miller's father. Or maybe you would in the presence of the photogenic leading gentleman.

But the less photogenic lady acts as if she'd never been west of 8th ave....It's an old Gish custom! Lillian's as well as Dorothy's.

• • •

Rebel to the End

Even in her final years, my Virginia grandmother on my father's side remained an unreconstructed Rebel. And now, down through the long pathos of distance, I can hear her voice defending the Mary Surratt who is the more-sinned-against-than-usual heroine of John Patrick's new and finest play.

In case you've forgotten—you'll be surprised how many intelligent people have—who Mary Surratt was and why she should be the more-sinned-against-than-usual heroine of the last John Patrick output, program-makers in W. 43rd st. are ready and waiting with the wherefore and the why.

Mary Surratt was, is and always will be, the woman who was hanged in connection with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It was in her Washington (D. C.), boarding house that the murderers conspired. And there's certainly little doubt that her son, John, was consciously—or perhaps unconsciously— involved.

As to Mary Surratt's personal innocence, there was, is and always will be two violently opposing sides. She was guilty or she wasn't guilty, make no mistake about it. But, at the same time, make no mistake about the legal chicanery of her fascinating trial. It was, as my grandmother was wont to put it, a "legal lynching."

The playwriting Mr. Patrick is quite shamelessly on grandma's side. His Mary Surratt is as innocent as you are. And terrifyingly tragic at the same time.

• • •

Take Your Choice

If you read T. M. Harris' "Assassination of Lincoln: A History of the Great Conspiracy," you'll have your doubts about Mary's innocence. If you read D. M. DeWitt's "Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and Its Expiation," you'll not be so sure. But if you see John Patrick's play, you'll know that Mary was a reluctant martyr.

And it is as a reluctant martyr—a martyr to mass hysteria, rising to inhuman heights when an actual victim cannot be found—that Dorothy Gish projects her in one of the most skillfully sustained performances the current stage has shown. Miss Gish's current playacting is worthy of its cheers, its bravos and its encores.

As Reverdy Johnson, who defends her, Kent Smith is as sincere as he is pictorial, which makes him sincere indeed. As Father Wiget (Father Walter to history books) Harlan Briggs turns a small part into a big one. Elizabeth Ross, who was Bernadette on Broadway, is fine as Mary's Anna.

But then, the entire cast is excellent, from the actorial John Wilkes Booth of James Monks to the simple soldier of Clyde Cook. But, as director of his own play, Mr. Patrick at times presupposes the audience's familiarity with the motivations of his play. Especially in the trial scene, where Mary Surratt is seated away off to one side...

As either theatre, history or a treatise on American mass psychology, "The Story of Mary Surratt" is to me required playgoing.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

'Mary Surratt' a Tense Tragedy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Story of Mary Surratt" deals with unimaginable injustice. Authenticated by careful research it describes the execution of the woman in whose home was plotted the assassination of President Lincoln.

On the face of the facts, the trial of Mary Surratt was insanely vicious. She was condemned to death as a traitor by a military court which had no slender claim to jurisdiction.

The reason for the trial was a complex one. The Secretary of War wanted desperately to set a precedent of military court trial for the crime of treason. He would then have arbitrarily seized and condemned all Southern Senators for their part in the war, and gained complete control of the legislature for the North.

Convicted On Inference.

This reasoning was heinous but logical. There is however no convincing explanation of Mary Surratt's conviction. There were a half dozen conspirators whose guilt was established beyond question. There was nothing but inference and circumstance to connect Mrs. Surratt with the crime in any way.

The court must have known there would be public revulsion against the woman's sentence, which in fact contributed nothing to the principle it was seeking to establish.

When the War Department refused to extradite her son who alone could have settled her guilt one way or another, it appears to have been indulging in the most inhuman vindictiveness.

Son Prey to Booth.

The boy was admitted by his mother to have been strange. He was complex, resentful and lonely, easy prey to the charm of John Wilkes Booth.

John Surratt brought to his mother's boarding house to live the motley crew who were carrying out Booth's maniacal plan. They met and connived in her home. But as the play presents the story, there was no reason to think that Mary knew what they were up to.

It was on the night of the shooting that she first suspected that her son was involved in some trouble, and even then she had no idea what it was.

Trial a Farce.

The trial was a farce. Mary's counsel was not allowed to make the slightest comment which reflected on the omnipotence of the court or the invincibility of the prosecution's case.

The only consolation for her bewilderment as she goes to her death is her old friend and attorney's assurance that she leaves an endowment of indignation. She goes to take her place with all the soldiers whose lives were given uselessly unless toward the world's mounting consciousness of justice.

Dorothy Gish contributes a distinguished performance as the victim. Mrs. Surratt was a woman of no particular stature or distinction. Miss Gish makes her normal and mediocre, with the homely graces and strength of a purely domestic woman.

Losing Battle.

Kent Smith has calm and force as the Senator who defends her. He plays with suppressed strength and undertones of violent indignation. Through the losing battle he consistently suggests that the man is the essence of reliability.

Elizabeth Ross does an exquisitely gentle job of Mary's romantic young daughter. Of a large cast, there stand out the two performances of Harlan Briggs as a priest of impertinent wit and wisdom, and James Monks as the flamboyant Booth.

Samuel Leve has housed the play in effective sets, and the author, John Patrick, directs the performance to move at a sharp pace.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

'Story of Mary Surratt' Presents Historic Miscarriage of Justice

By JOHN CHAPMAN

This is the time of year—around Lincoln's birthday—when the book sections come out with overwritten notices about the newest volume on Lincoln. One can count on at least one publisher to spring a new Lincoln book this week each year. The theatre rarely has such a sense of timeliness.

"The Story of Mary Surratt," which was presented at Henry Miller's Theatre Saturday evening, is right up to date. It is John Patrick's drama about the woman who was hanged, with three men, for participation in John Wilkes Booth's plot to send the President "up the spout."

There is much that is admirable in this play, yet I cannot find myself wholly enthusiastic about it—partly because, I think, its conclusion is foregone. Mr. Patrick has packed a complex story into three acts with remarkable clarity and has stated with seemingly indisputable logic the opinion held by many historians that Mrs. Surratt was railroaded to the gallows. Dorothy Gish offers a moving portrait of the condemned woman. And the production, by Russell Lewis and Howard Young, is excellent.

Careful History.

Although individual scenes like the arrest of Mary and her trial before the military court are dramatic, and others like the opening moments involving Mary and her young daughter are heart-touching, I did not feel the continuous and holding excitement I kept hoping for. I knew, of course, that the lady would hang, and I was convinced before the evening was over that injustice was being done—but Mr. Patrick's anger at this injustice was insufficient to bring me to the boiling point that makes a good audience.

I was, therefore, seeing a carefully made, carefully documented historical play—one on which I could look almost as calmly as Mr. Patrick must have looked upon the records and many histories of the Lincoln assassination in his search for material.

The story of Mary Surratt begins on the afternoon of the day Booth fired his shot in Ford's Theatre. It begins in Mary Surratt's boarding house, where she lives with her adolescent, dreamy daughter, her odd, intense son, John, and assorted boarders. Three of them are Payne, Atzerodt and Herold, who were hanged with Mary; the fourth is Louis Weichman, a petty snitch.

Mr. Patrick quickly and firmly gets his account under way. On the afternoon of the day Booth fired his shot in Ford's Theatre, he establishes Mary as a widowed gentlewoman who is worried about the company her son is keeping—Booth and her three boarders. He plants evidence against her much as it must have been misconstrued in her trial—her knowledge of a dagger found under her son's mattress, her sending a note to Booth asking him to come see her.

Trial of Mary Surratt.

The trial is a veritable Mary Dugan affair, condensing the evidence of weeks into one session of a biased nine-man military court. And the finale is, of course, the death cell, where Mary's old friend and defender, Reverdy Johnson, gives a terrified, mystified woman the courage to walk to the hangman.

The character of Reverdy Johnson probably is more historically accurate than it is emotionally satisfying. Now attorney general, Johnson was in his youth an admirer of Mary's. Defying the censure of the War Department and its court, he has volunteered to defend the woman. He is an able lawyer, but his efforts to present favorable evidence are consistently blocked. In one of the best moments of the lively courtroom scene, he fails to convince the tribunal of Mary's nearsightedness—an important point—when the prosecution forces the frightened woman to attempt knitting while blindfolded.

Kent Smith, as Johnson, has no great warmth—probably because the author has very carefully avoided fabricating a romance. Mr. Smith is just a worried, baffled lawyer whose one moving moment is his last-minute plea for clemency. There is an excellent bit performance by Harlan Briggs as a priest. Next to Miss Gish, the outstanding player is Elizabeth Ross as Mary's daughter. Miss Ross gives an exquisite, sensitive performance.

The producers, Russell Lewis and Howard Young, have assembled a large company of picturesque and competent men, and Samuel Leve's settings—particularly the courtroom—are of high order.

New York Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Historical Tear-Jerker

JOHN PATRICK has gone to the Congressional Library for the source material of his new play, "The Story of Mary Surratt." In the court martial of a civilian, implicated in the assassination of Lincoln, he has found a theme for pertinent editorial discussion on the stage of Henry Miller's Theater. What with a number of luminous portrayals and a superior production, the drama has moments of impassioned eloquence, and even poignancy. But from a standpoint of theatrical coherence and excitement, it is generally wanting. This portrait of a putative martyr in the cause of democracy is more laggard than inspiring.

• • •

Mary Surratt, you may remember, was the mother of one of John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirators. The author makes an outright claim that her execution was a terrible miscarriage of justice at a time when the military was still riding high. His argument is persuasive. His writing is sometimes so artful that his contemplation of an earlier post-war period takes on terrible and tragic overtones. What he has failed to do is to envelop his human drama in the larger outlines of his subject matter. Mary Surratt may have been the victim of overweening and vengeful machinations, but the exposition veers rather wildly between straight pathos and an indictment of anti-democratic subterfuges.

• • •

However spare the Patrick script may be in sustained and dynamic quality, the acting leaves little to be desired. Dorothy Gish plays the role of the title with brilliant poise and sympathy even when she is asked to go to her death with the wan comfort that it is "regrettable." Elizabeth Ross, who was so radiant in the stage version of "Song of Bernadette," once more achieves a glowing and aware interpretation as Anna Surratt. And Kent Smith, as Reverdy Johnson, who defended a supposed accessory to the killing of the Civil War President, is altogether heroic when the action permits him to be.

• • •

When the play becomes confused in the course of six badly integrated scenes there are other performers to give it interludes of authority. Harlan Briggs has a magnificent scene as Father Wiget when he confronts the panel of officers passing pudgment on the widow, and John Pimley gives a haunting portrayal of the Confederate General Jubal Bentley, who refutes perjured testimony in the presence of his conquerors. Patrick has staged his play effectively, with the aid of appropriate settings by Samuel Leve. Unfortunately, "The Story of Mary Surratt" is too heavily stacked a tear-jerker to rate as very satisfactory theater.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

'Mary Surratt Story' A Dignified Drama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"The Story of Mary Surratt" is another chapter in the evocative and provocative Lincoln saga. It has to do with the trial and conviction of those charged with conspiracy to assassinate the President.

It was in Mary Surratt's boarding house in Washington where the conspirators, led by John Wilkes Booth, lived and plotted. After the assassination, Mrs. Surratt was seized and condemned to death by the Army.

Author John Patrick believes her trial was farcically outrageous. Mary Surratt, he thinks, was innocent of any criminal association with the Booth gang. She was a good woman, alarmed at the influence the eccentric Booth had gained over her peculiar son.

Author Patrick has sought to present historical fact dramatically and emotionally. And a press representative has even suggested in a release that "The Story of Mary Surratt" is a glowing romance wherein a handsome lawyer defends the woman he has loved, giving it a touch of Hollywood glamor and heart throb.

But the fact is, for us at least, that Patrick has penned a literate, dignified, at times stuffy historical drama that probably will have a far greater appeal for patrons of our semi-pro art theatres than for the hard-boiled customers of the expensive Broadway showshops.

Producers Russell Lewis and Howard Young have given the play a fitting production. With the author directing, Dorothy Gish and Kent Smith contribute excellent performances, packing more eloquence and pulse hop into the characters of Mrs. Surratt and Johnson than Patrick wrote into them.

There is an especially amusing bit by Harlan Briggs as Father Wiget, a courageous priest, who gave honest testimony for Mrs. Surratt and a piece of his mind to the uniformed mobsters hounding her. Elizabeth Ross, James Monks, John Conway and Bernard Thomas also do well by other roles.

Samuel Leve has designed helpful settings.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

'Mary Surratt' Lumbering, Unwieldy Drama of a Woman Who Was Hanged

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

John Patrick turns back the pages of history to the fateful month of Lincoln's assassination in 1865 in "The Story of Mary Surratt," contending that the executed boarding housekeeper was a victim of perjury and of gross injustice at the hands of a military court. The new play by the author of "The Hasty Heart" came into Henry Miller's Saturday night.

"The Story of Mary Surratt" comes forth as a lumbering and unwieldy drama. The courtroom scene in the second act manages to achieve considerable bustle and a certain theatrical excitement, just as such scenes have been doing since "Madame X," but for most of the way the play is curiously uninteresting, never gathering cumulative dramatic force.

Playwright Patrick makes a case for Mary Surratt if he doesn't make a satisfactory play. He presents her as a trapped and bewildered woman, a gentle and kindly mother of two children, and completely innocent of conspiracy in the murder of Lincoln, for which she and three others—Louis Payne, George Atzerodt and David Harold—were hanged.

In the course of his three acts Patrick shows the arrest of Mary Surratt in her neat Washington lodging house an hour after the President's assassination; her trial in an improvised court room, before a violently prejudiced military board, and with a United States Senator, a sweetheart out of her girlhood, serving as counsel for the defense, and her death cell moments just prior to the hour of execution. The author depicts his heroine as a victim of outrageous court procedure and completely absolves her of conspiring with the sinister plotters to whom she had given board and lodging. But in telling his story, in reshaping history, Patrick has not fused his ingredients into a sturdy play.

Russell Lewis and Howard Young, to whom we are grateful for the revival of "Lady Windermere's Fan," have provided "The Story of Mary Surratt" with a fine realistic production and there are enough uniformed actors in the piece to have held the line at Chancellorsville. Some of the performances are good.

Dorothy Gish is excellent as the persecuted Surratt woman, a martyr caught up in the furor of a great tragedy. Kent Smith is forceful and eloquent as the Senator who comes back into her life in an hour of need. Harlan Briggs, appearing as Father Wiget, gives a grand vaudeville show in his witness stand scene, and James Monks is dark, lithe, slinky and menacing as John Wilkes Booth, seen only in the first act. Dr. Samuel Mudd, who gave the fleeing Booth refuge and treatment for his fractured leg, is a character in the play but doesn't speak.

Samuel Leve's scenery is good and so is the lighting of Girvan Higginson. But "The Story of Mary Surratt" fails by a considerable margin. The plight of the doomed Mary does not provide sustained or compelling drama.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 10, 1947

Woman in Lincoln Conspiracy Heroine of a Modest Drama

By Richard Watts Jr.

The episode of Mary Surratt is not one upon which Americans can look back with pride. Mrs. Surratt, you may remember, was the hapless widow who was hanged for complicity in the murder of Abraham Lincoln, because John Wilkes Booth and his fellow conspirators had met in her boarding house and post-war hysteria was high in the land. It was, historical evidence seems to show, as grave a miscarriage of justice as the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, and it is equally worth pondering at times when we tend to grow smug about the loftiness of our national ideals of justice and fairness.

In such a chastening spirit of patriotic examination of conscience, John Patrick, an enterprising playwright, who wrote about the war in Burma in "The Hasty Heart" and once contemplated vengeance and madness in the Antarctic in a melodrama dealing with polar exploration, has written and directed "The Story of Mary Surratt." Because it is an inescapably touching tale of innocent womanhood cruelly persecuted in a hostile courtroom, his drama is occasionally moving, but it captures too little of the national hysteria and confusion that followed the assassination of Lincoln to be successful.

Mr. Patrick has told the sad story of his doomed heroine simply and straightforwardly, but he is considerably too shallow and superficial about the implications of the tragedy. Dramatists never quite fail in a courtroom scene, and Mrs. Surratt's persecution is theatrically effective in the fashion of the famous stage trials of such heroines as Mary Dugan, although this time in period costume and without a happy ending. But the necessary dramatic background is lacking.

National Fear

Offstage mobs crying out against Mary Surratt and a court martial of bitter, violently prejudiced Federal army officers condemning her without evidence are not enough to dramatize the mood of national fear, hysteria and hatred, the aftermath of fratricidal war and the treacherous assassination of the victorious President, which kept the unhappy woman from receiving justice. That her trial was as hideously unfair as the play reports is doubtless true; the important and dramatic thing is the cause of the unfairness.

As Mr. Patrick sets it down, there is merely the black-and-white picture of villains persecuting an innocent victim out of the sheer joy of sadism. Without denying for a moment that the persecutors were just as brutally malicious as the claims, I still believe that the unhealthy post-war national atmosphere that brought about such villainy among men who had fought for four years to save their country from disunity is the most striking aspect of the story of Mary Surratt.

The dramatist seems satisfied to blame it all on the political chicanery of Secretary of War Stanton, who appears destined for the role of blackest villain in all current works about the Civil War. It is too simple, theatrically as well as historically. Mary Surratt, the spotless heroine of a melodramatic plot, is not only less believable but less dramatic than Mary Surratt, the incidental victim of a period of national madness.

Dorothy Gish is honestly appealing as the bewildered boarding-house keeper, and Kent Smith is sympathetic as the Senator who had loved her when she was a girl and comes to her aid in the hour of need. Elizabeth Ross is moving as the victim's daughter; the veteran Harlan Briggs has a delightful scene as a priest who scores for the defense, and John Pimley has a strangely moving bit as a Confederate general accused of cruelty to his prisoners. But the play, which could have been a challenging reminder of the perils of national hysteria, is just a mild drama of pathos.

"John Loves Mary"

The Sun

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

'John Loves Mary,' Expertly Staged, Brings Good Entertainment to Booth.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Perhaps Norman Krasna's "John Loves Mary" is not as deft a comedy as his own "Dear Ruth," but it offers abundant entertainment and it has been produced for all it's worth—and more—by three showmen who know their trade. The first performance was given last night at the Booth.

Krasna makes a little go a long way. His comedy is definitely of the manufactured variety and one for which there would be no second and third acts if the simple truth had been told in the first. It is also a play with some tremendously funny scenes, one being that in which a balcony usher at the Paramount, back in his old lieutenant's uniform, clamorously holds forth.

The author has made no mistake in the choice of his producers. His comedy has been given a world of expert attention by Joshua Logan, the director, and Logan's co-sponsors, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, fellows who have the decidedly quaint notion that show business can be a pleasure if you produce only hits. "John Loves Mary" is likely to be just that.

The story is tricky. If you want a portion of it, here goes: Fred and John were G. I.'s together and Fred saved John's life. John, to show that he had a decent sense of appreciation, married a Cockney girl, Lily, with whom Fred had had a romance in England, and did so only as a means of getting her to America, and so that she might get an immediate divorce and become Fred's bride. All right so far?

Well, when John returns his girl, Mary, the Senator's daughter, is right there in the St. Regis waiting to marry him, but he also discovers that Fred, who had come home first and who believed Lily to be dead, has taken himself a wife and is about to become a father. And now, from here, Krasna will try to untangle things in time for the final curtain. He does it.

Besides being staged with precision and skill by Logan, and played in a Frederick Fox suite that has the St. Regis look, "John Loves Mary" is engagingly acted. Nina Foch is a charming heroine. She is pretty, has a nice style and a feeling for comedy. There is a place for her in the New York theater if Hollywood will hold off. William Prince is capable and likeable as the harassed John, seeking to avoid bigamy, and Tom Ewell, in his performance as Fred, is amusing all the way. A good comedian, Ewell, in his dazed, deadpan, expressionless way, and his timing is fine.

'JOHN LOVES MARY.'

Comedy by Norman Krasna; directed by Joshua Logan; scenery and lighting by Frederick Fox; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; presented by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d in association with Joshua Logan at the Booth Theater Tuesday evening, February 4, 1947. The cast:

Mary McKinley	Nina Foch
Oscar Dugan	Ralph Chambers
Fred Taylor	Tom Ewell
John Lawrence	William Prince
Senator James McKinley	Loring Smith
Mrs. Phyllis McKinley	Ann Mason
Lieut. Victor O'Leary	Lyle Bettger
George Beechwood	Max Showalter
Lily Herbish	Pamela Gordon
Harwood Biddle	Harry Bannister

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in the living room of the apartment of Senator James McKinley in the St. Regis Hotel, New York. Act I, Monday afternoon, 2 p. m. Act II, Tuesday morning, 11 a. m. Act III, Scene 1, Immediately afterwards. Scene 2, Three hours later.

Loring Smith appears as the smug and blustery Senator, Harry Bannister as a caricature of a general, Pamela Gordon as the Cockney girl, and all to good effect. And there is a very funny performance from Lyle Bettger as the lieutenant turned into a movie usher. He is seen only in the second act. Many of us were wishing last night for his reappearance in the third.

"John Loves Mary" lags and sags here and there, but it is good entertainment, bringing a large measure of fun into the Booth. Broadway can well use it.

"John Loves Mary"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

A Pleasant Evening

A COMEDY of considerable hilarity has come to the Booth. "John Loves Mary," by Norman Krasna, contemplates the romantic imbroglio of a returned soldier and his sweetheart with more amusement than one has come to expect from such stage essays. The characters are nicely drawn. Their collisions and their conversations are generally on a plane of infectious levity. The fact remains that a complicated plot does less service to the show than Joshua Logan's superior staging and a company which is in admirable form for the occasion. The author should give heartfelt thanks to his interpreters for a pleasant session of stage fooling.

* * *

The premise of the piece is amply sufficient for farcical embroidery. The ex-G. I., in this instance comes back from three years of fighting as enamoured as ever of a deceptively naive Senator's daughter. The catch is that he has married an English girl in order to get her into this country for the buddy who saved his life more than a year earlier. When that character turns out to be both happily wed and expecting a child at any moment, the stage of the Booth is set for humorous explosions. The drawback with "John Loves Mary" is the fact that the opening scene promises more substantial antics than ensue before the final happy ending. Fun is sustained throughout three acts, but it does not build into much of a crescendo.

* * *

Logan, who is associated with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d in the production of the play, is chiefly responsible for the merriment. When the proceedings sag he takes over in his direction to keep them pointed and captivating. Bits of ridiculous business and interludes of pure pantomime fill in the dull interstices of "John and Mary," making them tolerable while the farce gets back on its trolley. What with Frederick Fox's elegant hotel suite setting the new offering on Forty-fifth Street is a handsome job of presentation. Krasna's writing has been brilliantly packaged.

The director has had the players to follow his cues. Nina Foch is attractive and very substantial as the girl who is reasonably puzzled when the lad she has been waiting for during the war balks at an early wedding. William Prince is equally believable and sympathetic as the bedeviled ex-sergeant who finds that a good turn for the man who saved his life is about to ruin his own. Tom Ewell is wonderfully ludicrous as the old buddy of the hero and Loring Smith gives a salty caricature of a Senator which is unfailingly amusing. Then there is Pamela Gordon, the daughter of Gertrude Lawrence, giving a pleasantly uppity portrayal of the English girl. "John and Mary" might have had far better writing and construction. The director and players make it a rewarding comedy.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If the phrase "farce-comedy" is still in the theatre's lexicon, this department asks your permission to apply it to Norman Krasna's "John Loves Mary," which was put on at the Booth last evening. It describes a comedy that is just the least bit hard to believe. Mr. Krasna is the author of "Small Miracle," which almost lived up to its title a great many years ago, and of "Dear Ruth," which thoroughly lived up to its title two seasons back.

Seizing upon a returning soldier and the maid who has loyally waited for him, Mr. Krasna has put an impediment in the way of their marriage that keeps them apart until it is time for all good theatregoers to go home. Joshua Logan, who has a special way with merchandise of this quality, has contrived a vastly enjoyable performance that is full of many comic twists.

* * *

To many happy people in the audience last evening this appeared to be enough. But this seeker after entertainment is bound to confess that Mr. Krasna's stratagem seemed like something of a burden on the performance and a sore decayer of innocent enjoyment.

When John returns he and Mary rush into each other's arms. Her father, the celebrated Senator, and her mother, celebrated at once removed, decide to have a cozy wedding within three days. But John has an unpleasant piece of business to finish and, happily for Mr. Krasna, he tells Mary nothing about it. First, you must understand that John owes his life to Fred, who picked him up on the battlefield, etc. Second, the girl Fred loved in England cannot be imported into America for several years, except as the wife of a G. I. To keep Fred from eating out his heart in loneliness, John has quixotically married her and brought her to America under an agreement to divorce her at once in Reno. Having a natural distaste for bigamy, John does not really want to marry Mary for six weeks.

If that sounds complicated for an ordinary farce-comedy, it may also suggest the reason why the rest of the play seems heavy-footed. For Mr. Krasna, being generous-hearted, keeps on complicating it as if at some time in his life he had been frightened by a third-act curtain.

* * *

Let's not be petty about the performance, however. Nina Foch is an especially attractive young lady with a gift for sincerity that deserves a better fate than Mary's. William Prince is also attractive and sincere, and obviously too intelligent to make the mistakes that John contributes to the plot.

The two romantic parts are played straight, and well. Mr. Logan's gift is to the subordinate parts. Loring Smith's stuffed-shirt Senator is a little gem of caricaturer—a little too belligerent and solemn to be true, but just enough to be richly comic. As Fred, the unwilling and terrified conspirator in an elaborate plot, Tom Ewell is wonderfully hesitant, timid and desperate. Harry Bannister suggests just enough fatuous authority to be an excellent satire on the ungrateful grade of brigadier general, headquarters staff. Pamela Gordon, looking astonishingly like Gertrude Lawrence at times, has some amusingly flashy moments as the loving Cockney wench.

Add to these artisans of comedy Ann Mason as the Senator's wife, Lyle Bettger as the sort of officer material that made many lieutenants surplus Army property, and Ralph Chambers and Max Showalter in minor parts—and you have a first-rate cast. Since Frederick Fox has housed them in an elegantly furnished hotel room, and Mr. Logan has directed them gaily, the natural question arises, "What would they be like without an author?" In that case, John might love Mary wisely and well.

PM

FEBRUARY 6, 1947

—Kronenberger—

A Complicated Farce But a Basic Formula

PM Reviews

It must be nice to know that the things you fill a play with will also fill a theater. Mr. Krasna, in any case, seems to know it. A hit for him would seem to be merely a synonym for a play, and rather easier, on the whole, to write. In *John Loves Mary*, as in *Dear Ruth*, Mr. Krasna knows his way about the audience almost better than he does about the stage. He is a trained popular psychologist in the field of laughter; a dealer in slick prefabricated parts in the field of construction. John will still be loving Mary at the Booth long after many other theaters have gone dark on more perplexing and less popular emotions.

Well, popular entertainment is all to the good, and Mr. Krasna is better at it than most. Some of *John Loves Mary* seems to me lively enough, and all of it seems innocuous. Furthermore, it has been given the very brisk production it requires. If this is pretty thin praise, the answer is that for me the play is pretty thin fun. I very often found it easier to understand why other people were laughing than to laugh myself. There were too many jokes I had done my share of laughing at in the past, or found far too pat to be funny. There were stretches that merely seemed tedious, and others that merely seemed complicated. And one trouble with purely popular comedy, Broadway-style, is that it never seems to have a really ingrained comic point of view. It never gets inside the characters or underneath the situations; it never subordinates the part to the whole; it never creates anything. Everything is exploded on you; nothing ever creeps up. Real humor squarely unites the most heterogeneous audiences; gags and Grand Rapids farce-furniture splits it at every turn.

* * *

John Loves Mary is predominantly farcical, and very much a thing of plot. It vies, indeed, with *Othello* is hopelessly complicating a great many lives that could be straightened out by five minutes' straight conversation. That, however, is very right for farce; what alone is wrong is that the complications become tiresome. John, who as you know loves Mary, comes home from the wars to marry her. But John's army pal, Fred, had come home earlier—without the English girl he loved. And since the girl could only get into the United States by marrying a soldier, John had married her, expecting her to divorce him immediately and marry Fred. Unfortunately, it turns out that Fred has already married some one else and is momentarily expecting a baby.

With this for a starter, and with John and Fred trying to use their wits instead of coming clean, the play piles complication on complication and crisis on crisis. Some of these are entertaining, but the plot, in the end, tends to get in the

way (the more so as it requires scenes that have to be played fairly straight). Things are actually more fun when they partly depend on character—on Mary's father, a tough baby of a Senator; on a heel who had been John's lieutenant and is now a "major"—in the Paramount's ushering corps; on a general who is very defensive about the Army. But the best things, the genuinely comic things, are bits of pantomime practiced by the befuddled John and Fred.

As Fred, indeed, Tom Ewell is the funniest thing in the show; and William Prince gets a good deal into the straighter-written part of John. Nina Foch's Mary seems to me on the weak side; but Loring Smith is excellent as her father, and Harry Bannister and Lyle Bettger are very helpful as the brass hat and the heel. And Joshua Logan's direction is perhaps the most helpful thing of all.

—Louis Kronenberger.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

'John Loves Mary' Is A Welcome Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein maintained their perfect batting streak when, in association with Joshua Logan, they scored with "John Loves Mary" at the Booth Theatre last night. Other R. and H. four base hits have been "I Remember Mama," "Show Boat" and "Happy Holiday."

"John Loves Mary," like other R. and H. clicks, is the result of careful planning. The producers get their scripts as nearly right as possible before rehearsals, take their time and obtain the right people for their casts and sign the right director. All of which adds up to 100 percent right or success.

"John Loves Mary" is a slender, farcical script from the pen of Norman Krasna, but its people are human and credible and get into enough funny situations to keep you laughing appreciatively through most of the evening.

John is an Army Sgt. returned from Europe engaged to a Senator's daughter and married to an English music hall dancer. He had become engaged to Mary before embarking for Europe and wed Lily to get her into the United States for a pal who had saved John's life.

John's pal in the meantime had given up Lily for lost and married another girl by whom he is expecting a baby. The rest of the play is concerned with John's efforts to stall off his wedding to Mary till he can obtain a Nevada divorce from Lily.

Nina Foch, of the films, and William Prince are ingratiating as the frustrated romantics, Mary and John. Miss Foch is a very pretty young lady and Prince a personable young fellow. Their capable, restrained acting elicits your approval and sympathy.

Tom Ewell, who was on the verge of a brilliant stage career when he sailed off with the Navy, proves that he hasn't lost his chuckle-provoking touch as John's pal. He scored something of a personal triumph last evening with the first nighters.

Ann Mason, Loring Smith and Harry Bannister are excellent choices for other roles, and there are lesser, but nevertheless good, contributions by Pamela Gordon (Gertrude Lawrence's daughter), Lyle Bettger and Max Showalter.

Co-producer Logan has directed admirably. It requires considerable skill to keep farce from becoming implausible and hokey. Logan, as with "Happy Holiday," has made farce glisten and shimmer like first rate comedy. That is quite a trick.

Frederick Fox has designed a tasteful setting. It's supposed to be an apartment in the St. Regis Hotel, which is lucky if it boasts any flats as attractive as that on the Booth's stage.

The town has needed another legit hit for quite a spell and "John Loves Mary" is it. Kid-gloved escapism, it offers a pleasant evening of playgoing.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

Title of 'John Loves Mary' Almost The Whole Plot—and Lots of Fun

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is difficult to believe that so thin-spun a comedy as Norman Krasna's "John Loves Mary" could provide the money's worth spent on an evening's amusement—but it does, and take my word for it. A happily chosen company of highly companionable comedians makes the new play at the Booth Theatre a, to coin a phrase, welcome diversion.

Whether he is writing for the films or for the stage Mr. Krasna is an expert at stretching unsubstantial events to feature length without allowing them to break and snap back in his face. In "John Loves Mary" there is only one idea, but it is droll enough to serve nicely.

John is a soldier who has come home to his Mary, and an immediate marriage is what they and everybody else most heartily desire. One little thing stands in the way, though. Out of gratitude to a buddy who once saved his life in battle, John has married his best friend's best girl. She being English, this is the most efficient way of getting an alien into the U. S. After six weeks in Reno John will be free to wed his Mary.

An Unwanted Bride.

Unhappily, the buddy has gone and married somebody else, leaving John stuck with an unwanted bride—and that's about all there is to the play. Mr. Krasna toys with this situation all evening and gets a great deal of fun out of it.

I don't think there could be a better choice of actors than the ones hired by Rodgers and Hammerstein and directed with the skill of a seal by Joshua Logan. Perhaps my favorite is Loring Smith in the role of Mary's father, a crusty senator. Mr. Smith's delivery, deportment and sense of timing are extraordinarily effective.

But your favorite might easily be William Prince, who, as John, has to look pallid, sweaty and distrait for most of three acts. Or it could be Tom Ewell, who is immensely comic as the forgetful buddy, or Nina Foch, who makes a very charming Mary. There are other good performances by Ann Mason as the senator's wife, Harry Bannister as a general, Lyle Bettger as an ex-lieutenant who has become a major of ushers at the Paramount Theatre and George Beechwood as a Red Cross do-gooder.

Mr. Krasna's plot will stand no further examination than I have given it. The laughs are planted from minutes to an hour ahead of time and their approach is telegraphed with the obviousness of a clumsy punch—yet when they arrived I laughed at them all. As they used to say in the cigaret ads, it's fun to be fooled.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

A Bright, Brisk New Comedy About a Returned Soldier

By Richard Watts Jr.

Norman Krasna, of Hollywood, is a slick and resourceful theatrical craftsman, whose dramatic art is compounded of the brisk and brittle comedy tricks of stage and screen in equal proportion. His plays tend to seem manufactured rather than written, and they are certainly free of any high, bold imagination, but, properly directed and acted, they can be bright, expert and entertaining. They may be machine-made, but at least the machinery is in sound working order. In "John Loves Mary" the Krasna technique is functioning with pleasing efficiency, and the Rodgers-Hammerstein organization has clearly produced another hit.

The new comedy shows signs of kinship in spirit and manner with Mr. Krasna's successful "Dear Ruth," which should insure its local popularity. I have the misfortune to find myself mildly uncomfortable in the presence of plays so slickly fabricated and lacking in creative spirit, but, of its school, "John Loves Mary" seems to me highly effective. For not only is Norman Krasna a competent workman but Joshua Logan, the director, and Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, the producers, are brilliant showmen, and here all of them are to be found working happily.

Passport Bride

"John Loves Mary" is another story of the returned service man and his love. Without missing a trick, it tells how a young soldier named John comes back to marry a girl named Mary, but finds his romance somewhat handicapped by the fact that he has forlornly acquired an English wife. You must not blame him, though, for his seeming lack of fidelity to the fiancee. He had merely married the other girl to get her a passport so that she could come to America and marry the friend who had saved his life in battle.

Such added complications as the Senatorial pompousness of Mary's father, the amiable officiousness of a friendly general and the undesirable presence of an unpopular lieutenant turned Paramount Theatre usher provide enough material to keep the playwright going at the proper speed. As there is no denying that the situations are manufactured, there is likewise no escaping the fact that they are manipulated amusingly.

One pleasant thing about the new play is that its people are genuinely likeable. Characters in mechanized comedy are so frequently annoying that it is impossible to care what happens to them. In "John Loves Mary," however, they are so agreeable that you are actually interested in seeing that things work out well for them, since you can even believe that the hero and heroine do care about each other.

Good Playing

Obviously that is in great part due to the dexterity and competence of the playwright and the skill of the direction. Much of the credit, though, goes to the players. It is not easy, for example, to make the youthful hero and heroine of these romantic comedies seem anything more than stock figures, without life or credibility. But William Prince and Nina Foch, who play the boy and girl of the current fable, are believable, attractive and human, even when their activities are slightly less than that.

Tom Ewell, who is always an effective player, is particularly good as the friend whose European romantic problem causes the complications, and his performance is one of the real comic achievements of the season. As the pompous Senator, who is the heroine's father, Loring Smith achieves the considerable feat of making the politician both fatuous and likeable.

Pamela Gordon, the daughter of Gertrude Lawrence, who happily possesses her mother's smile, plays the English girl pleasantly, while Harry Bannister is of assistance as the general and Lyle Bettger has a good scene as the lieutenant who has become an usher. "John Loves Mary" may be surefire Hollywood fare, but it is agreeable in the theatre, too.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

'John Loves Mary' Opens at the Booth

By ROBERT GARLAND

When experts pool their talents, as Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, Joshua Logan, Norman Krasna, Frederick Fox and Lucinda Ballard have pooled theirs in the replacement at the Booth, the result is almost certain to be—expert! And that is just what "John Loves Mary" is, a farce-comedy which is skillful, proficient, dexterous, adroit, slick and handy.

In a word, "John Loves Mary" is expert, as expert as it could not help but be with Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein as producers, Mr. Logan as associate and director, Mr. Krasna as dramatist, Mr. Fox as designer and Miss Ballard as runner-up of costumes. No new show would dare go wrong with all that theatrical expertness behind it.

No new show has, believe me. Outside the Booth, in W. 45th st., the elements may be cold and unfriendly. But, inside the theatre, the fine-feathered first audience is warm and cordial. There, as the experts have planned expertly, "John Loves Mary" is of such sure-fire on-stage stuff as Broadway smash hits are made.

Last night, hard by the slippery Shubert Alley, there was never a doubt as to the triumph of expertness over the inexpertness which had been exposed at the Biltmore the night before.

• • •

Laughable Story

When you think of it, there is no vast difference between the play-making formula used by Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse for "It Takes Two" and the play-making formula used by Norman Krasna for "John Loves Mary." None save that of craftsmanship. Basically, the farce-comedies are surprisingly alike. But one is expert, while—

Let us linger with the expert one. In "John Loves Mary," the skillful play-maker tells the laughable, but unlikely story of a returning overseasman who has double-crossed himself in behalf of the buddy who has saved his life on some World War battlefield. Yes, John loves his Mary. But he had married Fred's Lily so as to bring her home to Fred.

And Mary loves her John. Loving him as she does, she cannot understand why he shies away from marriage. Neither can Mary's father, who is a senator, nor Mary's mother, who is no brighter than she might be. Only John and Fred know. And John is married to Fred's Lily and Fred is married to another who is about to become a mother.

These are complications. But they are nothing when compared to those that follow when a lieutenant known as O'Leary, a general known as Biddie and the lady known as Lily barge into the laughable but unlikely situation.

• • •

Handsome Couple

The fine, fresh cast assembled by the experts is part of their expertness. First among the unfamiliar faces is the fine, fresh, funny face belonging to Tom Ewell. Mr. Ewell may have been around in "They Shall Not Die," "Brother Rat" and "Sunny River." But you have not really seen him until you see him as the comic cause of the "John Loves Mary" mixup.

As Mary who loves John, Nina Foch is a delightfully different young performer on whom to keep an eye. As John who loves Mary, William Prince is, along with Paul Douglas of "Born Yesterday," a reformed radio announcer who has learned to speak like a human being. And act accordingly. He and Miss Foch make a mighty handsome couple.

Loring Smith is an amusing stuffed-shirt sort of senator. Ann Mason is his humdrum helpmate. Harry Bannister is every inch a general. Lyle Bettger is a fine figure of a lieutenant-into-usher. Pamela Gordon is her mother's own daughter as Lily, John's wife-in-name-only. Her mother is Gertrude Lawrence, as one passing glance will tell you.

Yes, from play-making through play-producing to play-acting, the Booth's new show is expert. Mary loves John, John loves Mary, and everybody loves "John Loves Mary."

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

'John Loves Mary' Very Funny—in Spots

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"John Loves Mary" is a vehicle for some of the funniest performances on the local boards. For much of its course it is geared by ingenious comic direction.

It has a good many racy laughable stanzas. And then it has precipitate lulls so deflating and listless that the effect is as if Whirlaway, half way down the stretch, just sat down for a breather.

The truth is that most of the comicry results from astute direction making the most of actors who can give masterly readings of lines that are not overwhelmingly funny, and who are experts at the art of reaction. After a while the slow "takes" are not enough. You want some real verbal wit.

Silly Explanation.

All the complications and suspense grow from the unmotivated concealment of a fact which affects everybody in the cast. At the end a deliberately silly explanation of the concealment makes you feel like a sucker.

John, on his way out of the Army, has married an English girl, Lily, solely for the purpose of bringing her to this country. His best friend, Fred, was in love with her but lost her after a blitz.

John arrives to discover that Fred has married another and is about to become a father. He also finds the Mary who has waited for him for three years, intent on a speedy marriage.

Tries to Stall Wedding.

The rest of the play involves John's desperate efforts to stall his wedding long enough for a trip to Reno, while protesting that he still loves the urgent Mary.

It is no surprise that when Mary learns the truth she accepts it with the same equanimity she would have shown if informed of John's gesture five minutes after the curtain went up.

There are many complications as John and Fred on one team, and Mary and her parents on the other, plot to outwit each other. Joshua Logan has kept many of them taut with his direction. He gets laughter and fragments of suspense through deliberate tempo and inventive gestures.

Unfortunately, scenes that mean little to the play's course, instead of being thrown away, crawl with intent delivery.

Ewell a Lovable Bumpkin.

The performance, with a unanimously good cast, is little short of a triumph for Tom Ewell who is splendid as the bumpkin Fred. He is lovable and ridiculous, wide eyed and limber-jawed with confusion, and manages to look like a perplexed parrot. The portrayal has resource and style.

Outstanding too is Loring Smith as Mary's Senator father. He gets all there is and more out of his part as a prominent parent who loves his own jokes, and likes the feel of his own weight being thrown around.

Nina Foch is a lithe and handsome Mary whose frankness is an honest virtue. She and William Prince, as John, play some delightfully spellbound love scenes. As the devious suitor, Prince is exuberant in his devotion, and neatly manages to get away with some of the most continuous silent torture an actor was ever asked to portray.

Ann Mason is pleasant as the mother who really gets into the picture only in the last act, and Harry Bannister takes care of deflating a general's pomp.

Lyle Bettger makes a sinister ladies' man, and Pamela Gordon chirps and cavorts her way through the role of the British war bride. There are flashes when in looks and voice she seems a blonde copy of her mother, Gertrude Lawrence.

"It Takes Two"

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

Domestic Wrangle Lacks Punch on Stage

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"It Takes Two" should have been called "They Deserved Each Other." Purporting to depict a postwar domestic rift, it concerns two charmless wranglers who give no sign that they ever cared a whit about one another.

Thus the risk to their marriage is insignificant. It is depicted with neither wit nor poignancy. The situation may be true to life but it is trite stuff in a theater. The writers' approach is photographic, but with a small-size Brownie.

Connie is temperamentally a case of arrested development. Her loving system of treatment of hubby is to upbraid him unmercifully for having agreed with her when she was wrong.

Todd is a well-meaning mate who plainly bores his wife to death. His chief failing is a fumbling cowardice where Connie is concerned.

He Prefers Swamp Life.

It is one of those marriages about which you feel that the war has prolonged it beyond its natural life.

They have spent his Army years traveling but now at last have a home about which Connie is romantic and industrious. Todd is neither. Connie finds that he would prefer to live by a swamp he wants to help drain rather than continue being an industrial designer in comfort. She berates him for deceiving her.

They decide to live in separate rooms in their apartment until they can find separate homes. Each finds the other with a prospective tenant, and each jumps to the conclusion that the other is having an affair.

All this is explained and they depart for the swamp, which is not calculated to improve her temper or his charm.

Not for the Stage.

Martha Scott is attractive looking as the wife, but there is not much else she can do to make the character appealing. Hugh Marlowe is even worse off with the husband, a character whose brightest conversation consists of remarks like "Let's take a load off our feet" and "Ixnay."

Anthony Ross is easy-going as the husband's engineering friend and Vivian Vance adds her own humor to a cousin of the wife. In smaller parts Temple Texas and John Forsythe make the would-be tenants the most likable people involved.

Undoubtedly things like "It Takes Two" happen all the time, but there seems no particular reason why they have to happen on the stage.

As one couple, departing in the first intermission, remarked, "We fight funnier at home any time."

'IT TAKES TWO.'

Play by Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse; directed by George Abbott; setting by John Root; presented by George Abbott and Richard Aldrich at the Biltmore Theater Monday evening, February 3, 1947. The cast:

Connie Frazier	Martha Scott
Mr. Fine	Julius Evans
Mrs. Loosbrock	Reta Shaw
Bee Clark	Vivian Vance
Elevator Boy	Robert Edwin
Todd Frazier	Hugh Marlowe
Monk Rathburn	Anthony Ross
Comfort Gibson	Temple Texas
Bill Renault	John Forsythe

SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in the living room of the Frazier apartment in the Murray Hill section of New York. Time: Late fall, 1946. Act I, Scene 1. Late afternoon. Scene 2. One o'clock the next morning. Act II, Scene 1. Saturday afternoon, two weeks later. Scene 2. Five-thirty the same afternoon. Act III. None, the next day.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Two producers and two authors put on a comedy entitled "It Takes Two" at the Biltmore last evening That is the most amusing thing about it. The two producers are George Abbott and Richard Aldrich, who are practically grown up by now, and the two authors are Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse, who can probably develop over the years. When Broadway was suffering from delayed adolescence after the last war, "It Takes Two" might conceivably have seemed funny to some of the backward scholars in the freshman class at Yale. (Substitute Harvard or Princeton according to taste.) But even with Martha Scott fluttering around in it most expertly, "It Takes Two" is only a slight improvement on "Loco," which was the dampest whizzbang of this season.

* * *

Most of it is concerned with the subject of a divorce for two young folks who are just settling down in an apartment of their own after the rootlessness of the war. The authors spend three-quarters of the evening arranging a divorce, and the last quarter canceling it. Except for some impishly amusing writing for one male character who lives in a near-by apartment, the authors have written nothing that would upset the gravity of a club of sedate bookkeepers.

But theatre-goers are nervous people who laugh at anything, particularly if they think that it's audacious. As the life of the two chief characters degenerated into quarrels and debauches, the audience did quite a lot of laughing last evening, and really threw themselves into it when the hilarious expression "house of assignation" turned up in the dialogue. That was the peak of the evening's amusement. Nothing the authors could grind out of the joke-box could top that rollicking explosion of merriment.

* * *

In the presence of such ordeals as "It Takes Two" a petulant theatregoer spends most of the evening wondering how intelligent people get caught wearing old hats of this period. For example, how did Miss Scott get in here? An enchanting actress, with quickness, intelligence and taste, Miss Scott can hardly think that the part is amusing, despite the many busy things Mr. Abbott has set her to doing. The cast includes Vivian Vance, Anthony Ross and Hugh Marlowe, who have had sensible parts in the last few years. The cast also includes Temple Texas in the part of a blond tramp that must have been left when "Loco" vacated the premises several weeks ago. Given some good lines to speak, John Forsythe contributes the only real amusement the play provides.

He ought to feel lucky. Little America, take it away!

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Doesn't Add Up

SEVERAL agreeable players strive valiantly to make consecutive merriment in "It Takes Two," the new farce at the Biltmore. The best they achieve are occasional snatches of amusing banter, a few sharp caricatures and a scene or two of slick slapstick. For Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse, who have written this rigmarole of marital misunderstanding, have employed a form without giving it any genuine substance. Their proposition for a series of antics is absurd: their resolution is stuttering. Martha Scott and her assistants make the most of random gayety under George Abbott's direction, but the show is as thin and misshapen as a penny run over by a streetcar.

* * *

Having no sustained dramatic push, "It Takes Two" is in its happiest mood when the plot is tossed out the window. When a big blonde tramp wanders into the proceedings to take off her shoes or drink a Martini made without the Vermouth, the piece has a comic verve which is generally missing from the main doings. There is even an incidental fist fight in the final act which is quite funny. The principal theme, which involves an ex-G. I. and his wife in a trivial quarrel and has them on the verge of a divorce before a specious reconciliation, is so meaningless that it moves steadily to an inevitable let-down. Farce is something more than the assembling of rather dizzy people exchanging wise cracks.

* * *

Unfortunately the comely and knowing Miss Scott has the tough task of making the heroine believable and sympathetic. If her portrayal is not one of her best, it is scarcely her fault. She manages to make part of the running brawl with her husband infectiously ludicrous and brings superb timing to bits of business, such as trying to settle an apartment. Hugh Marlowe is less successful in the part of the harassed pants wearer. He has some awkward moments trying to decide whether a scene calls for serious or burlesque exposition. Anthony Ross charges around as an old friend of the family who becomes involved in the wingding, but it is pretty broad clowning.

* * *

Altogether the most delightful participant in "It Takes Two" is Temple Texas, who plays the blonde with brittle emphasis. She murders the king's English or emerges from a bedroom in a negligee at an inopportune moment with hilarious effect. Vivian Vance is caustically amusing as the wife's cousin and Reta Shaw has a good bit as a real estate agent right out of a cartoon. The company in this Abbott-Richard Aldrich production is all right. So is John Root's setting. All that is wanting is a comedy of content and laughter.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

'It Takes Two' Routine Domestic Comedy Starring Martha Scott

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A play like "It Takes Two," which was presented at the Biltmore Theatre very early last evening by two highly experienced gentlemen of show business, George Abbott and Richard Aldrich, is usually referred to as a domestic comedy. This is a misnomer, for nobody in a domestic comedy is ever domesticated, or housebroken. If the young husband and the young wife of any play like this one—and there have been many—had the slightest training in human relations they would not build up such monumental misunderstandings and there would not be any comedies like "It Takes Two." Since I have already seen "Made in Heaven" this season, I could stand the loss.

In this newest hubby-loves-wife charade considerable talent is exercised, so my lack of sustained excitement over the venture may be put down as personal churlishness. The authors, Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse, have devised several crisply funny lines, even though most of their situations are only normal. Mr. Abbott has directed the company with his usual fine sense of pace and the players themselves leave nothing to be desired.

Miss Scott Excels.

Foremost in the cast is Martha Scott, once typed as the lugubrious heroine of "Our Town" and subsequently employed in tear-jerking cinemas. In recent seasons Miss Scott has been industriously amusing, and in "It Takes Two" she is as accomplished a domestic comedienne as you would care to see. She makes an aggrieved wife as funny as an aggrieved wife can be—if this is funny enough.

For her husband there is Hugh Marlowe, equally aggrieved and equally misunderstanding. One of the rules of domestic comedy is that the husband has to have a scene in which he is either drunk or possessed of a hangover; in Mr. Marlowe's case it is a hangover and he accomplishes it admirably.

There must also be the friends—two of them, one, female, for the wife and one, male, for the husband. The female friend makes nasty remarks and the male, a well-meaning jerk, adds to the marital mixup by doing stupid things. These two characters are correctly portrayed in "It Takes Two" by Vivian Vance and Anthony Ross.

Girl From Texas.

There must also be another woman and another man in one of these plays, so that the husband and wife will have something besides themselves to quarrel over. In last evening's version the other woman was something special—a tall and well-stacked blonde who told her theatre program biographer that her name was Temple Texas and that she came from Dallas, Tex. This Miss Texas of 1947 plays a dumb but accommodating southern gal with delightful effect.

There are others who move in and out of a domestic comedy—handymen, fat females who enter only for the purpose of having exit lines, and such. There also is a plot. In the case of "It Takes Two" it concerns the apartment shortage and the difficulty of a husband and wife living apart in three and one-half rooms. It turns out all right, as these plots always do. And as they always did in the funny papers, in the old days when the funny papers were funny.

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 5, 1947

—Kronenberger—

Nothing New, And Almost Nothing Funny

PM Reviews

A number of people who should know better (including, I suspect, the authors) are involved in some very lame doings at the Biltmore. *It Takes Two* requires more than an act and a half just to reach one of the most familiar outposts on the whole map of farce, and then does very little to justify so long a journey. The play's virtues narrow down to a few amusing lines and a couple of agreeable minor characters. For the rest, we are asked to accept a situation that doesn't ring true for the sake of laughing at something that almost never seems funny.

The play tells of an ex-GI and his wife who, after several years of marriage on the hoof, prepare to settle down in a New York apartment. But their first night there, they get into one of those quarrels that nobody but a playwright would prolong beyond bedtime, and decide to separate. Owing to the housing shortage, however, they must live apart under the same roof; and presently other ladies and gentlemen appear on the scene to make the husband and wife think the worst of each other. It will hardly be violating a confidence, however, to report that love not only triumphs in the end, but triumphs unsullied.

* * *

The play takes so long getting out of its overcoat that it seems less like farce than like farce tacked onto domestic comedy. The domestic comedy portion is just an outright bore—you care nothing about the couple themselves, and are seldom amused or convinced by anything they do. If the farce passages are a trifle better, they yet revolve around so moldy a situation that the fun has an in-memoriam quality to it, rather than anything at all fresh or surprising. Indeed, it is only when a handsome blonde tramp is busy drinking neat gin or kicking off her shoes that *It Takes Two* comes halfway to life.

Temple Texas, who plays this agreeable character, rather streetwalks off with the acting honors; and John Forsythe, in a bit part, probably comes in second. Martha Scott is, of course, the star of the play, and does well enough in the fairly bad role of the wife. Hugh Marlowe cannot distinguish himself in the rather worse role of the husband; and Vivian Vance and Anthony Ross are in there fighting, too. Despite George Abbott's energetic directing efforts, I'm afraid *It Takes Two* is a troublesome evening on both sides of the footlights.—Louis Kronenberger.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

'It Takes Two' Is Just a Thin and Shaky Comedy About Our Housing Shortage.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Two authors and two producers, in the case of last night's exercises at the Biltmore, have worked together in turning out a new comedy that isn't much of a play. "It Takes Two," written by Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse, has some nice dialogue here and there, but it is generally poky and tiresome and very lightweight.

The Misses Faulkner and Suesse, in writing about love and marriage and that ever-spreading housing shortage, had a rather comical notion for a play. They set up an erstwhile G. I. and his young wife in a snug flat after four years of shuttling from camp to camp, put them to quarreling, and have them decide upon a separation. It's with the understanding, however, that they will continue to share the apartment because there is no other place to go. New York is like that.

From that point on "It Takes Two" goes into misunderstandings and complications, running steadily downhill, and winds up in reconciliation, just as farce comedies have been doing since "Fair and Warmer." Or since "Mrs. Temple's Telegram."

George Abbott and Richard Aldrich, two esteemed gentlemen of our theater who should hardly be wasting their time with such items as "It Takes Two," have cast it well enough, at that. Martha Scott, an attractive and competent actress, does a good deal with the part of the silly wife, and considerably more than High Marlowe accomplishes as the husband.

Vivian Vance, pride of Albuquerque, N. M., gets touches of comedy into the role of a well-meaning and sharp-cracking friend. Anthony Ross, ever to be remembered as the gawky extrovert, the gentleman caller, in "The Glass Managerie, has a rather trying time as one Monk Rathburn. Temple Texas, a tall and softly drawling blonde, is amusing in a minor role and so is John Forsythe in another.

"It Takes Two," to which George Abbott has sought to bring life with some of his familiar, high-speed direction, is a thin and shaky comedy. The drama slipped badly last night in 47th street.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 4, 1947

'It Takes 2' Bows At the Biltmore

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"It Takes Two" to make a quarrel or a title. And authors Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse might as well have called their comedy "A Tempest in a Tepot," anyway. For that's just what it is: a rather sedate tempest in a tiny teapot.

The Misses Faulkner and Suesse have fashioned a plot so frail that its every moment on stage is endangered by the Biltmore Theatre's air-conditioning. One extra-good puff some night will blow it into West 47th St.

But the Misses Faulkner and Suesse have strung onto their thin story about a dozen clever laugh lines, so amusing they almost succeed in making you believe they've been draped on a play.

Connie and Todd Frazier finally wrangled an apartment in New York after seeing the world for four years as guests of the Army. Then, on house-warming night, they quarreled over trifles and decided to get a divorce. A blonde with curves and a handsome chap called to inspect the apartment and—

You've guessed it—Connie thought Todd was pitching woo at the curvaceous gal and Todd was certain Connie had developed a yen for the personable guy. So, the next day they were reunited and Todd took a job with an Army buddy on a big construction job in Louisiana.

"It Takes Two" is in three acts and five scenes, but they are so slight it appears you've hardly settled comfortably in your seat before you're rising to exit for an intermission at the final curtain.

Martha Scott and Hugh Marlowe are excellent as the quarrelsome, but rather nice, Fraziers. A luscious number named, believe it or not, Temple, Texas, contributes, as a chorus-girl apartment shopper, such hilarity as hasn't been observed hereabouts since Choo-Choo Johnson impersonated a Western Union messenger in a Gloria Swanson dramatic misdemeanor.

"It Takes Two," in sum, is about a dozen very funny lines in search of a play. They are spoken to best advantage by experts. So wonderfully spoken, in fact, that they almost convince you they constitute a dull evenings entertainment. Which they really don't.